

## *Message from Commissioner Nancy Navarretta*



Greetings, now that fall is upon us I hope that everyone has been able to find some time to reflect on the beauty that is all around us. I've lived in Connecticut most of my life, yet I still find myself in awe of fall's splendor. October's newsletter features a roundup of new campaigns and partnerships. We also take a moment to celebrate a longtime employee and highlight an inspiring initiative that you may not have been aware of. Thanksgiving will be here before we know it, so its never too early to start giving thanks!

As always, please feel free to reach out with thoughts, ideas, or suggestions. We sincerely appreciate your feedback!



### **New Partnership Between DMHAS, DOT, DESPP and CTHRA**

In an effort to address a marked increase in persons who may be experiencing homelessness, mental health, and/or substance use concerns at CT Rail and FasTrak stations, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) has partnered with DMHAS and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to provide a new outreach program. The goal of this new program is to engage, support and connect people who may be unstably housed, or who may have challenges with mental health or substance use, to community resources.

Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance (CTHRA) outreach workers will be available to transit stations in the evening hours, between 10PM and 1AM. These outreach workers will assist individuals with getting into shelter or onto the shelter waitlist; making housing plans; seeking treatment for mental health or substance use issues, and; linking people to other services as needed. State Troopers will also be available during evening outreach to support the safety of the CT Rail, CT FasTrak employees, outreach teams, and riders.

CT Harm Reduction Alliance Outreach workers will have lanyards and badges that clearly identify them as well as allow them to ride the rails and FasTrak, so that engagement can happen on the trains, buses, or at the stations. This new program will begin with a focus on the Hartford and New Britain stations, and will expand to other locations over time. If you have any questions, please contact [Mollie.Machado@ct.gov](mailto:Mollie.Machado@ct.gov).



Connecticut has new laws for buying, carrying, and using marijuana. Learn more at **BeInTheKnowCT.org**



Cannabis use can hurt the teen brain development. **BeInTheKnowCT.org**



Keep children and pets safe from accidentally consuming cannabis. Learn how to store cannabis safely and legally. **BeInTheKnowCT.org**



Get tips for starting the conversation. **BeInTheKnowCT.org**

## New Campaign: **BeInTheKnowCT**

This November, DMHAS is launching **BeInTheKnowCT**, a new statewide public education campaign. The campaign is designed to reach youth, parents and trusted adults, pregnant and breast/chestfeeding individuals, and the general public to provide education on the new laws, the effects of cannabis, and offer practical solutions and reliable resources to help mitigate potential harmful effects of cannabis use.

Each Connecticut resident has to make an active decision on what role cannabis plays in their life, which can be difficult due to all the information (and misinformation) available. **BeInTheKnowCT** helps to bring clarity by delivering messaging that comes from an objective place, is research-based, unbiased and presented in a neutral and judgement-free tone to assist with active decision-making.

This campaign offers messaging tailored to different populations. Youth messaging for individuals ages 12-20 focuses on prevention and is based on research that shows cannabis use impairs developing brains and academic success. Parents and trusted adult messages will focus on how important their voices can be in a young person's decision not to use cannabis. Messages for pregnant and new parents empowers those to protect their infant's development by understanding the harm cannabis can cause and to talk to their health care provider. Messages for the general public will provide clarity on the new laws, safe storage, driving under the influence, and health risks. For each audience the campaign provides information on understanding the signs of cannabis dependency while offering support and resources.

**BeInTheKnowCT** will use media meaningfully to target audiences, including television, radio and online ads, social media and a user-friendly website. Be on the lookout for **BeInTheKnowCT** on the nearest billboard, bus or social media post. Please like and share!

## Provider Spotlight: Jennifer E. Kolakowski, CEO, Recovery Network of Programs



Recovery Network of Programs (RNP) is a non-profit social service agency that has been providing critical recovery care and support services to the Greater Bridgeport Community for 50 years. Jen has been with RNP since 1994 and has had a career in social work since 1989. She has over 25 years' experience in non-profit leadership, management and administration. Under her leadership, RNP has expanded services and was awarded a Top Work Place and received a National Culture Excellence Award in 2022. Jen is a member of Soroptimist International, a worldwide service organization for women who work to improve the lives of women and girls in local communities. [Click here to visit RNP's website](#)

### What do you love most about your job?

Without reservation, the very best part of my job is spending time in our programs, with our staff and clients. It grounds me and connects me to our mission and staff and is always such a great reminder of why I chose and love the work we do at RNP.

### Are there any challenges?

There are so many challenges in leading organizations these days. I have found that having an inner circle of very smart, experienced mentors and colleagues to turn to makes all the difference in the world. It helps me create a different mindset and approach to so many of the challenges we face.

### RNP is celebrating 50 years this year, what do think is the reason behind such longevity?

We are very focused on our mission and creating innovative solutions that have a lasting, positive impact for the individuals and communities we serve. We are clear on our values and attracting and retaining incredibly compassionate, smart staff who share the same values and our vision for the future.

### Can you share a fun fact about yourself? Any interesting hobbies?

Spinning, yoga and running are all favorites. I love to travel but I am *not* a huge fan of flying. I love to read and always have a book with me. As a mom of five, I am a superfan of hockey, volleyball and theater.

Recovery  
Network  
of Programs

Helping people build better lives since 1972





## 2022 Managerial Service Award – Ellen Boynton



Congratulations to Ellen Boynton, who recently received the Managerial Service Award, which is given annually to recognize exemplary service and dedication to the State of Connecticut. Ellen began her career with DMHAS several decades back as a Mental Health Assistant and she left state service for a period of time thereafter. She returned as a Trainer in our Office of Multicultural Health Equity (OMHE), and was promoted to Training Program Coordinator in 2008 until she ultimately retired as the Director of OMHE in February of 2021. Ellen was nominated for this award based on her long and distinguished career, as well as her contributions to DMHAS and those whom we serve.







## Happy Halloween!

Oliver the “Bee” recently paid his friends at Woodward Hall a visit for Halloween. Oliver belongs to DMHAS Chief Compliance Officer, Elizabeth Taylor, and is always a well-received visitor.

Hope everyone had a happy and safe Halloween!





## Michaela's Garden

[Michaela's Garden](#) originated as a tribute to Michaela Petit after the 2007 tragedy in Cheshire. Michaela's favorite flowers were Four O'Clocks, which she grew in her backyard. The seeds from her plants were used to propagate additional plants, which began with a garden on the rooftop of the Connecticut Science Center in Hartford.

Whiting Forensic Hospital established a relationship with the Petit family, enabling the facility to grow the flowers on site. The Rehabilitation and Vocational department works collaboratively with the patients at the end of each May to plant Four O'Clocks delivered by the Petit Family. Whiting usually receives around 150 plants, which populate a garden outside of the Dutcher building, and two at Whiting Max. Each year, Whiting collects the seeds from the plants and returns them to the Petit Family to continue the process.

